

THE

NUGGET

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BRANDED BY A CURSE.

BY LIEUTENANT PRESTON GRAHAM.



"CARL CAMERON, MURDERER! ASSASSIN! I BRAND YOU WITH A FATHER'S BITTEREST CURSE!"

BRANDED BY A CURSE.

By LIEUT. PRESTON GRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

ALONE UPON THE OCEAN.

Night upon the mighty deep!

The restless waves leaping heavenward, as if to clutch at the inky storm-clouds sweeping above them.

The shadow of the gathering storm, casting gloom upon the waters, and the splash, splash, of the spray, the ominous and deep mutterings of the tempest alone heard.

No sail in sight within the circle of the human vision, and the elements of sea and sky about to mingle in a wild war, as the storm-clouds hurl their fury upon the nervous waters of the ocean.

Above, all is gloomy grandeur; around, all is darkness.

And yet, in the eastward horizon, far off over the deep, twinkles a little star, gradually losing its luster as a silvery radiance grows brighter and brighter, for not thither have the clouds yet swept to veil it in blackness.

Brighter and brighter grows the silvery luster, wilder and wilder spring the waves, darker and darker grow the clouds, louder and louder roars the tempest.

Then, above the eastern horizon is visible a rosy light—a flame it seems.

Is it a ship on fire? A gallant vessel doomed to fiery destruction there in the midst of the ocean?

No, the light has shape; it looms up like a great ball of fire above the ocean, and a path of brilliant, glittering splendor tracks the sea and falls upon a strange sight, for its gleams light up—the face of a human being.

Yes, a youthful, beardless face, upon which the spray dashes and sparkles like diamonds, as the tint of the moonlight falls upon them.

Yet, there in the solitude of the ocean's depths, with boundless expanse around him, the waves dashing him hither and thither as a mere plaything, and the rumbling of the gathering tempest, the face is firm, fearless and determined, while the earnest, dark eyes turn upon the rising moon, and adown its glimmering pathway, as with strong and steady stroke his way he urges, as if he finds some hope, some comfort in following its silvery tracks, and turning his back upon the storm.

What a rush of thoughts does the sight of that youth, alone upon the waters, bring up!

Has he fallen overboard from a passing vessel?

Has he ventured too far from land in a tiny boat that has failed him in the hour of need?

Or, has he been hurled into the sea and left there to die by those who wished him dead?

Suddenly a shadow falls upon his face, and the moon is momentarily hidden from view.

Have the storm-clouds become jealous of its silvery beauty, and hurled an inky veil of mist across its disk?

No, it is a shadow of hope, for, relieved against the silver shield, stands out in bold relief the delicate tracery of a vessel.

One cry of hope, that sounds strangely there in the ocean's solitude, and the bold swimmer struggles on.

Again the shadow crosses the moon, again the rigging of the vessel is seen—a long, rakish schooner, crouching upon the water, and under sails reefed down, beating up into the very teeth of the approaching gale, upon short tacks, as if to keep her sharp prow pointed well for the fury of wind and waves which soon would be hurled upon her.

Again the graceful schooner crosses the silvery pathway; nearer and nearer to the solitary swimmer it approaches, and with beating heart he watches the fleet craft spring from wave to wave, and yet, to him, she seems to drag along.

Thus the moments slip by, and then, nerving himself for a mighty effort, he cries out in a ringing voice:

"Schooner ahoy! ahoy!"

No sign on board the vessel shows his hail is heard, and again and again, until his voice was hoarse, he cries without reply.

"Great Heaven will she pass me by? Must I be left here to die—to sink far down beneath these waves?" he cried, and with another mighty effort he hurled forth his wail: "Schooner ahoy! ahoy!"

A moment's silence, and then came faintly back:

"Ahoy! Where away?"

With hope in his heart his strength revived, and again he sent a ringing cry across the water, and with joy beheld the schooner change her course, and then come directly toward him.

"Oh, Heaven! I thank thee! Thou hast heard my prayer for life, even though that life be accursed and devoted to revenge."

And the swimmer clasped his hands together, raised them above his head, and glanced upward.

Then above him hovered the sharp bows of the schooner, crowded with men; a dozen stout ropes were thrown him, and the next instant he was upon the vessel's deck, to totter and fall insensible just as the veil of the tempest swept across the moonlight, and left the sea in darkness, while with a mighty roar the storm-clouds burst in fury, and beat with angry violence upon the gallant craft.

CHAPTER II.

THE HIGHWAYMAN.

The shadows cast by the setting sun were creeping far across the lawn, and the solid walls of a Southern university arose in bold relief against the western skies.

Around, upon every hand, was a landscape, nature in repose, and hill and valley mellowed beneath the soft touches of autumn.

The campus of the university was deserted, for the students had assembled at tea, and yet beneath the shadow of a spreading oak stood two youths earnestly conversing in an excited manner.

The one was a blonde, the other a brunette, and yet their features strangely resembled, showing that kindred blood flowed in their veins.

Both were about the same age, scarcely more than eighteen, well formed, graceful, and possessed of strength and activity.

They were dressed fashionably, and appeared just what they were, university students, and the sons of wealthy parents.

Both were stangely handsome, though there rested in the face of the blonde a certain expression of recklessness the brunette did not possess, also a look of dissipation not observable in the other.

The former was speaking when the attention of the reader is first directed toward them, and his manner is impatient, his tones have an angry ring.

As if in reply to some remark of the brunette, he replied:

"Yet you could do so if you wished, Carl Cameron."

"I could do so, true, Oscar; but I would betray a trust in so doing," mildly responded the brunette.

"To the duse with your trust; the money was paid into your hands for my father, and he need not know you have it for weeks, and in that time I could regain my losses."

"I fear you would but swamp that, as you have hundreds of others, Oscar. No; I wish I could aid you, but I cannot."

"Your cursed meanness alone prevents," angrily replied the other.

"You should not certainly accuse me of meanness, Oscar, when for the past year I have given you all the spending money I could get—all of which you have gambled away; but it is useless to urge; I will not give you the sum you desire out of funds not my own; but if you need it, as you say, so urgently, write to your father, and—"

"Nonsense! He has no money except what he has in trust for you and your mother, and already has he helped me out of scrapes."

"I am willing to loan it to you, Oscar, if you get his consent; but you know he is my guardian, and I have no right to touch a dollar without his knowledge."

"Well, there is no help for it. What do you intend to do with the money, Carl?"

"I shall ride into town to-night, and deposit it in the hands of the treasurer of the bank. I am sorry, Oscar, but I cannot help you more," and Carl Cameron walked away and disappeared in the dining-hall; while, shaking his clenched fist after him, and with a muttered curse, Oscar wended his way toward a dense forest half a mile from the university, and within its dark depths soon disappeared from sight.

The sun went down behind the western hills, and daylight died away as darkness slowly enveloped the earth in its sable mantle.

The sound of gay voices resounded through the campus, and from many a window glimmered the student's lamp.

Then another sound broke on the ear—the rattle of hoofs, as a horseman dashed swiftly along the gravel-way which wound through the college grounds and then led into the timber-land beyond. The next moment the horseman disappeared in the woods, and at the same rapid gait continued on.

Through the almost midnight-gloom of the forest he pressed his way, until his steed suddenly bounded one side, as a dark form sprang from a thicket and grasped the bridle-rein with a force that hurled him back upon his haunches.

A sharp word to his horse, a sinking of the spurs into his sides, and the rider would have dashed over his enemy; but an iron

hand held the bit, and a lingering ray of daylight piercing the foliage, discovered to the horseman the glitter of a pistol as it was raised threateningly, while a hoarse voice cried sternly:

"Throw down your money, or I'll have your life!"

The horseman was no coward, and, in defiance of the demand, again drove the spurs deep into the flanks of his steed.

Then all was confusion—a bounding, frightened animal, a curse, the snap of a pistol-cap, another bitter oath, the flash and report of a revolver, a groan, a fall, and the rapid ring of hoofs as the horse bounded away, still carrying his rider, who held in his hand the smoking weapon, and glanced back over his shoulder to where lay the form of him who had demanded his money or his life—his life forever fled from its clayey casket.

CHAPTER III.

BRANDED BY A CURSE.

Shaping gently down to the white sandy beach, that beat back the heavy billows of the broad Atlantic, was the lofty estate of Sea Vista, the home of the Camerons for three generations.

Thousands of acres of land, under fine cultivation, surrounded the rambling and grand old homestead, with its wide chimneys, spacious halls, and gable roofs, and within and without there was every appearance of wealth that commanded comfort—nay, luxury.

Fronting the restless Atlantic, the lawn was washed by the miniature wavelets of a small bay, half encircled by an arm of sand that protected it from the rude buffets of the ocean beyond, and made it a safe haven for the anchorage of small craft, of which there were two then in the harbor, with a few small row-boats pulled out upon the sandy beach.

Along the seaside ran a broad highway, upon which was visible a horseman dashing over the ground at a rapid pace, his horse covered with foam and dust.

The horseman was Carl Cameron, he whom the reader last beheld at the university in animated conversation with a fellow-student.

But the handsome face was pallid, the eyes hollow, and the brow clouded, while the tight shut teeth seemed to press back some inward emotion that would find utterance.

As if familiar with the road, along dashed Carl Cameron, until the glimmering walls of the mansion were visible through the park, and upon the broad piazza he beheld two persons gazing seaward.

The one was a man, the other a woman.

The former had perhaps seen forty years, was distinguished-looking in form and face, and yet bore traces of having lived a fast life.

The latter could scarcely have been more than thirty-six years of age, and possessed a beautifully-molded form, and a face that was sadly beautiful, for in the inmost depths of her dark eyes dwelt a world of sadness, as if they looked back into the past and communed with a hopeless sorrow.

Suddenly the eyes of the gentleman fell upon the approaching horseman, and he cried, quickly:

"Ha! there comes Carl—and he is pressing his horse hard. Can harm have befallen Oscar?" and an almost deadly pallor crossed his face.

In alarm the lady glanced up; but ere she could utter a word, Carl Cameron dashed up, threw himself from his horse, and in a voice tremulous with emotion, cried:

"Mother! be brave, be strong, for I have that to tell you which will wring your heart with anguish as it has mine."

"Speak, sir! In Heaven's name speak, and tell me what of Oscar, for I know harm has befallen him. Ay, he must suffer while you escape!" and the gentleman seized Carl's arm and gazed wildly into his face.

"Would to Heaven I had been the one to suffer, and not Oscar—"

"In mercy's name tell us what has befallen my son!" almost shrieked the man, clutching at the throat of Carl in his terrible excitement.

"Take your hands from me, sir, and you shall hear," and Carl shook off the hold upon him, and then, speaking more directly to the lady, said, in sad tones:

"With pain I tell, pain that none but myself can feel, that Oscar is dead!"

"Dead! My son dead! Carl Cameron, *you lie!*" and again the man sprang toward the youth, whose eyes flashed fire, and whose face turned even more pallid, as he replied:

"Captain Cameron, bound as you are to my mother, kindred as you are of mine, I must not brook that insult. Yes," he added, sadly, as his mother sank sobbing upon a chair, and the man stood before him trembling with anguish and anger commingled. Yes, Oscar is dead, and would that were the only evil—the worst is yet to tell—he fell by my hand!"

"Ha! Cain-accursed fratricide! you dare tell me, his father, that you slew him? By Heaven! I will have your vile life and avenge him!" and again the man sprang upon the youth, to be hurled back with terrible force by Carl, who, turning quickly, pointed down the road, simply saying:

"Captain Cameron, from my heart I feel for you; but, oh! am I not to be pitied? See! yonder comes the body of poor Oscar."

Winding along the highway, and approaching at a slow trot, came a covered wagon, which the next moment halted before the door-way to the mansion, while the man, the woman, and the youth stood like statues, and saw the four men who accompanied the vehicle, quietly take from it a dismal-looking casket and place it upon the piazza, at the feet of those who stood there.

One glance upon the upturned face of the dead, with the mark of a bullet-wound in the forehead, and with a loud cry the woman swooned away.

One bound and the man knelt beside the dead, and gazed into the pallid, upturned face, and a smothered groan and curse were crushed through his teeth, while he cried:

"Oh, Oscar, my son, my poor dead boy!"

Like a panther he then sprang to his feet; his face hard as stone, and eyes ablaze as he wheeled upon Carl, and hissed forth:

"Carl Cameron, murderer! assassin! this is your work by your own confession, and for it may you be accursed among men! Ay, Carl Cameron, I brand you with a father's bitterest curse; eating, drinking, waking, sleeping, may you be accursed upon earth—yes, accursed to-day, to-morrow—through eternity I brand you with my curse!"

The parched lips could utter no more, and with a hiss of hatred through his teeth, Captain Hugh Cameron fell back fainting into the arms of those who had borne to Sea Vista the dead body of his son.

CHAPTER IV.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

When Carl Cameron heard the curse with which he was branded, his head sank upon his broad breast, and for a moment he seemed almost overcome with the emotions that crept over him, but recovering himself by a mighty effort, the youth turned toward his mother, who was slowly recovering from her swoon, and whose dark, earnest, sad eyes turned upon him with an expression it was hard to fathom.

"Mother, are you better?" he asked, sadly, as he leaned toward her, as she half-reclined in the large piazza chair, into which she had sunk back.

"Yes, Carl; but leave me—oh, leave me!" groaned Mrs. Cameron.

"Great Heaven! mother, do you also drive me from your presence?"

"Go—go, Carl!"

"Mother, listen. True, I took the life of poor Oscar, but you have not heard how. Hear my explanation of—"

"No explanation can palliate the taking of a brother's life, Carl."

With a groan of anguish Carl Cameron turned slowly and walked away, turning his steps toward the beach, and leaving behind him the dead and the living who thus cruelly treated him, and a shudder crept over him as he felt the branded curse that had been hurled at him.

As he went along his thoughts reverted to his family history, of how his father had been the twin brother of Hugh Cameron.

His father was a young man then of noble impulses, while Hugh was a wild and reckless youth, who, after getting his parents into trouble through his extravagances, ran off and went to sea.

A fearless fellow, handsome and intelligent, by his own exertions, Hugh Cameron had risen from before the mast to the quarter-deck of a man-of-war, and returned home in time to receive his father's dying blessing and a small sum of money, all that was left him out of a fortune that would have been princely had it not been for his extravagant living.

As for his brother Rupert, he had inherited Sea Vista Homestead and its broad acres, and hoarding his wealth, was immensely rich, and herein lay the first cause of Hugh's hatred for his brother.

Another soon occurred, for Hugh loved a fair maiden, the promised wife of Rupert, and did all in his power to win her affections from his brother.

But she remained true to her plighted faith, and became the wife of Rupert Cameron.

It was said Hugh had only loved her because she was rich;

but whether rumor spoke true or not, it is certain that after her marriage with his brother, he immediately left the neighborhood, to return a month after with a young and lovely wife, one to whom he appeared most devoted.

The result of these two unions were Carl and Oscar Cameron, and in giving birth to her son, Mrs. Hugh Cameron lost her life.

In despair at her loss—for it was certain that he loved her—Hugh Cameron again went to sea, leaving his son Oscar in the care of his brother Rupert, to the surprise of all who had known of the ill-feeling he had held for him.

As the years passed away, the sailor father was wont to often visit his son, and most warmly was he received by Rupert and his wife.

At length, when the youths were in their fifteenth years, Hugh Cameron returned once more to Sea Vista Homestead, and was told that its master was no more, and for a while he seemed prostrated with grief.

Yes, a month before his brother's return from his cruise, Rupert Cameron had gone out upon the ocean for a moonlight sail in a small boat, and accompanied only by a negro companion, the boatman of the estate.

A storm came on late that night; they had ventured too far out on the treacherous waters, and from that fatal day no tidings had come of them—they had found a grave beneath the sea.

The death of his brother affected Hugh Cameron deeply, and he no longer went to sea, but remained to protect his sister-in-law, and to educate the two youths—his own son and Carl.

Ere a year had passed by, however, Mrs. Rupert Cameron shut out of her heart her dead love, and became the wife of Hugh Cameron, greatly to the delight of both Carl and Oscar.

As for Hugh Cameron, he was almost poor, as regarded this world's goods, and he felt that, while Carl had been left immensely wealthy by his father's death, poor Oscar would have comparatively nothing, and this caused both father and son to look with envious eyes upon the noble-hearted and generous Carl.

Appointed by his wife the guardian of Carl, he had the control of his property, and knowing that the youth's grandfather had willed his wealth also to him, appointing his mother to control it for him until he was of age, Hugh Cameron plotted and planned to in some way retain a part of these riches to Oscar.

With perfect trust, Mrs. Cameron made her husband full guardian of all the wealth of herself and her son, and from that day there began a plot against Carl by his stepfather.

Thus matters stood when the two youths left Sea Vista for college, in their seventeenth years; and hardly had Oscar been in the university a month, ere he entered upon the same wild life that had distinguished his father years before.

In vain was it that Carl supplied him with funds, and then remonstrated with him as his money was swept away in gambling and extravagance. It was useless; Oscar Cameron would have his own way, and Carl liberally supplied him, until that evening when they were presented first to the reader.

Then Carl had refused, for the money left in his hands—a large sum—was paid him by an insurance company for a house of his own in town, and which had been destroyed by fire.

True, the money was Carl's, but without the sanction of his guardian, he had no right to use it, and in this determination he remained firm, as the reader has already seen.

All these thoughts passed through Carl Cameron's mind, as he slowly paced to and fro on the sandy beach.

And then painfully swept over him the thought of his stepfather's curse; for Carl did not believe that he was plotting against him, or held ill-will and envy toward him, and from his earliest boyhood he had loved Hugh Cameron. With a shudder, he thought of the terrible curse, and then murmured:

"Oh, if he but knew all! if my poor mother had allowed me to tell her that it was Oscar who had attacked me in the forest, and that when I rode back and found out who it was I had slain, it nearly killed me, too! Yes, he intended to rob me; and the letters I took from him proved that he was plotting with his father against me. But I did not intend to tell them what I knew; I did not intend to cut their hearts with the thought that Oscar had become a highway robber for a paltry sum of money; no; I hid all that at the inquest, and merely said it was a joke; that Oscar had endeavored to frighten me, and, not recognizing him, I had fired and killed him. Oh, Heaven have mercy upon me! for I am exiled from my home, with a brother's life-blood upon my hand, and the brand of a curse upon my brow—Ha!"

The sudden exclamation of Carl Cameron was caused by receiving a severe blow, which felled him to the ground, while three men threw themselves upon him, and in an instant he was securely bound and gagged, within sight of the lights of the mansion, for the night had settled down upon land and sea, and the bold deed was enshrouded in darkness.

CHAPTER V.

NO MERCY! NO HOPE!

Hugh Cameron had loved his son with a more than ardent affection, and hating Carl, as he really did at heart, he had bestowed upon him a father's curse, unaware and heedless of the causes that had led to the taking of one brother's life at the hands of another.

When Carl walked away, Hugh Cameron paced the floor like an enraged tiger, unmindful of the distress of his wife, who had been borne by the servants to her room, where she lay moaning in sorrow upon the bed.

The body of Oscar was taken into the parlor by the men who had borne it to Sea Vista, and from one of these Hugh Cameron learned the manner in which Oscar had fallen, as it was believed, in trying to frighten Carl, by waylaying him upon the road, and snapping a pistol in his face.

Suddenly glancing toward the beach, Hugh Cameron beheld the form of Carl, pacing to and fro, with bowed head, and over his face swept an expression of evil, while his eyes glittered with fiendish malice.

It was growing dark, and a bank of clouds in the westward betokened a storm, and after a glance around the horizon, Hugh Cameron gazed earnestly into the face of the man near him.

It was an avaricious, cunning face he beheld, and at its expression Hugh Cameron seemed pleased, for he said:

"My man, I am completely prostrated by this blow, especially as I feel that yonder designing youth upon the beach did this deed purposely, for you must know that *my* son was rich, while *he* was not. Now, how would you like a snug sum of money for aiding me in a little work of revenge?"

"I am not the man to soil my hands with blood, sir, but then——"

"I do not wish you to stain your delicate hands—leave that to me; but I need aid, and if you and one of your companions desire a handsome purse full of gold, just say so."

"I'm the boy to make the money, sir, if it's not bloody work, and Tom Saunders yonder is a pal o' mine, and will go the whole figure with me."

"Well; now hold yourself in readiness for my return; have your horses put up for the night, and my servants will see to the comforts of your companions until we return," and thus speaking Hugh Cameron entered the mansion, and half an hour afterward returned enveloped in a heavy cloak.

Darkness had now come upon the earth, but it was light enough to see the forms of two men standing upon the piazza, and advancing toward these, Hugh Cameron said simply, in the quarter-deck manner usual to him:

"Follow me, men."

Silently they obeyed, and soon the three stood beneath the shelter of a large oak growing near the beach cliff.

"Men, I do not intend to mince matters, but to say frankly I need your aid, and I will pay you well for it."

"What is we to do for the money, boss?" asked Tom Saunders, quietly.

"Merely to aid me to seize, bind, and gag yonder boy."

"What is yer going to do with him, boss?" continued Saunders.

"That is none of your business. Will you aid me?"

"How much cash do you go on it, captain?" asked Wirt Scales, the man to whom Captain Cameron had first spoken upon the subject.

"One hundred dollars each."

"Boss, that is a small sum for a man to keep on his conscience a secret that might turn out a murder," said Saunders, doggedly.

"Well, two hundred each. Is it a bargain?"

"We is to know nothing in case the boy does not turn up again?"

"No; merely aid me to seize and bind him, for he is a perfect giant for strength——"

"And quick with a shootin'-iron, I guess, too," put in Wirt Scales.

"Yes, but we will seize him unawares; then put him in yonder sail-boat for me, and you two can go to blazes if you wish."

"So I guesses you would rather have us do; and look here, boss, that ungenerous remark of yourn has just cost you one hundred dollars more, 'cause we want fifty more each for your bad wishes."

With a muttered curse Captain Cameron answered that he would pay the sum, and cautiously descending the cliff, they watched their opportunity, and as Carl turned in his walk, the three men hurled themselves upon him, and, notwithstanding his brave resistance, he was soon securely bound, gagged, and placed in the bottom of the sail-boat.

Then Hugh Cameron counted out five hundred dollars to his allies in crime, and shoving the boat off he raised the sail and stood seaward.

There was a good breeze blowing, and over the waves bounded the staunch craft, until no longer visible were the shores of Sea Vista, which were left leagues astern.

Then, when only sea and sky were visible, and the gloomy darkness of night rested over all, and the low muttering of a rising storm was heard, Hugh Cameron brought his craft up into the wind and lay to.

Then from the mouth of Carl he took the gag, and cut the bonds that held his feet, while he said in his harsh and bitter tones:

"Carl Cameron, now your time to die has come!"

The brave boy shuddered, and a cold dread seized his heart, while he replied:

"Why do you hold evil toward me, Captain Cameron? Heaven knows I did not willingly slay poor Oscar."

"Boy, I hated your father before you, when he took from me the woman I would have married, and you I have ever hated, Carl Cameron, and I swear it, this night you die! Into these waves I cast you, and that the horror of your fate may be before you, I will free your limbs, that you may swim about until you sink."

Carl made no reply, but glanced nervously landward, and seeing the look, Captain Cameron said, quickly:

"Oh, you need not look for hope there—you are four leagues from land, and yonder rises your doom within the hour, notwithstanding you swim like a fish," and the wicked man pointed toward the gathering storm, while Carl said, bitterly:

"Would to Heaven that storm would break now."

"Ay, but you'll not have your wish, and before this breeze I can run into the bay ere it comes. Now, sir, prepare to die."

"Will you leave me to drown like a dog, Captain Cameron? Have you no mercy?" cried Carl, earnestly.

"No, I have no mercy for you," slowly and sneeringly replied the man.

"Then I have no hope?"

"None—no you have not an atom of hope. Come!"

As Captain Cameron spoke he raised Carl in his strong arms, for bound behind his back as were his hands, he could offer slight resistance, and was hurled into the sea.

A rope still held him to the boat, which Hugh Cameron at once put upon its course landward, and, as the youth was towed rapidly through the waters, he was drawn alongside and the bonds that held his arms were severed—not an act of mercy, but of refined cruelty, that he might linger the longer with death staring him in the face.

Released of its load the boat bounded forward, and Carl Cameron was left to his fate, while the inhuman man, who had thus condemned him to death, shouted back:

"Now, boy, your doom is sealed, and as a dying thought, I will tell you that your father fell by my hand!"

With a shriek of fury Carl Cameron bounded forward through the waves, for he was a superb swimmer; but the wind drove the little craft too swiftly forward, and all hope was gone, and in almost despair he sank beneath the waters.

Yet still with determined tenacity he clung to life, and floating and swimming, with the waves rising higher and higher, the winds blowing harder and harder, the approaching storm roaring louder and louder, he still struggled on against hope, alone in the mad sea, with darkness, despair, and death around him, until hours had passed, and then the moonlight came and brought hope to his heart, for across its disk passed a sail—a schooner that saved him from the doom to which he had been condemned by the inhumanity of Hugh Cameron.

CHAPTER VI.

ON BOARD THE PRIVATEER.

At the period of the opening of this story, kind reader, the United States was just recuperating from the war of 1812, the second war held by the United States against the mother land of England, and still sweeping the seas were numerous swift privateers, loth to relinquish their adventurous careers and preying voyages, although called in by the cessation of hostilities long before.

The schooner, upon whose deck Carl Cameron found himself, when recovering consciousness, was one of this class of privateers.

A long, lean looking hull, sharp bows, and masts that raked far aft, she appeared to possess wonderful speed, while an armament of four broadside guns, and three pivot thirty-twos, mounted forward, amidships and aft, with a crew of seventy-five men, proved that she was fully capable of making a desperate fight should occasion occur.

Upon returning to consciousness, for his long struggle in the sea, with hope and despair alternately clutching at his heart, had overpowered him, Carl Cameron found himself in a spacious and luxuriously furnished cabin, while around him was every indication that the schooner was a sea-warrior, for pistols, cutlasses, and weapons of various descriptions and nations were systematically arranged around the mainmast, beyond which were two doors, one leading into a state-room, the other into a kind pantry.

At first it was hard for Carl to recall where he was, but presently all the bitter past rushed upon him with cruel force, and he covered his face with his hands. The next moment he glanced around him.

Above decks all seemed confusion, and loud, stern, orders and rushing feet were heard above the roar of the tempest, which had burst with fury upon the schooner, causing it to bound madly in the wild waters.

"Oh, sir! will we be lost?" suddenly cried a boyish voice, and turning quickly, Carl beheld a lad of fourteen standing at his side, and who, unseen, had approached through one of the open doors of the cabin.

It was a strangely handsome face he gazed upon with his golden hair hanging upon his shoulders, dark blue eyes, and daring mouth, with its white, even teeth, while the form, delicate, graceful, yet denoting strength, was clad in a handsome suit—a black jacket, trimmed with silver buttons and lace, white cloth pants, and a sailor's cap, encircled by a silver cord.

Worked in red silk in front of the cap, and upon the left cuff of his jacket, were two swords, crossed, which Carl understood as an insignia of the vessel, and again he turned his eyes upon the handsome face of the boy, and replied to his question, so earnestly asked:

"Oh, sir, will we be lost?"

"No, my lad; this seems a stanch craft, and is doubtless well commanded. But why do you so fear death?"

"Not for myself, sir; but if I were to die there is one who would be forever lost. Hark! how heavy that wave fell upon the deck," and the lad started as the schooner shook from stem to stern with the force of the waves hurled upon her.

Carl was a thorough sailor, for from his earliest years, living as he did upon the sea-shore, he had passed most of his leisure hours upon the water in his little yacht. Having recovered from his long swim for life, he at once ascended to the deck, and a wild scene met his gaze, and the gallant craft was bounding and plunging violently, while her crew were lashed forward and aft to masts and bulwarks, to prevent being torn off by the sea.

Upon the quarter-deck stood three men, whom Carl at once saw were officers, for a vivid flash of lightning lit up their forms and faces distinctly.

The elder looking was a man of perhaps thirty-five, with upright and tall form, and a full-bearded face, while his eyes were dark, restless, and full of fire and daring.

His attire was the same as was worn by the lad whom Carl had seen in the cabin, only he wore a sash of scarlet silk, two pistols, and a short, double-edged sword, and a wreath of silver leaves around his cap, and upon either shoulder, as if doing the duty of epaulettes, were the crimson-crossed swords.

His two companions were similarly attired, excepting the silver-worked vine around their caps, instead of which was a band of bullion.

In their faces there was nothing striking, excepting one appearing to be wholly reckless, and the other wearing a look of habitual dissipation.

The crew wore skull caps of red woolen, dark blue shirts, and white duck pants, and seemed a hardy, daring set of men.

These observations Carl made in an instant almost, by the flashes of lightning, and then the schooner's captain stood beside him, and shouted in his ear, to be heard above the storm:

"I hope you will not prove a Jonah to us—see, we have two dangers to face," and he pointed to windward where was visible a large brig-of-war.

Ere Carl could reply, there came a vivid flash, more heavy than the lightning, the deep boom of a heavy gun, a whizzing, sound wilder than the wind, a crash of timbers, and the main top-mast was left wildly dangling in mid-air.

"Into the rigging there, some of you, and fix that spar, or we'll have it coming like a harpoon through our decks!" loudly ordered the captain, and three brave fellows sprang to obey, one to be the next instant whirled off on a mighty wave that fell upon the schooner, his drowning, despairing cry mingling with the shrieking winds.

The other two gained the ratlins, and began the ascent, and then the heart of one failed him, he started to return, lost his presence of mind, let go his hold and fell into the seething waters.

The third, undaunted by the loss of his two companions, strug-

gled on upward, gained the top, lost his footing, and hung by his hands above, moving hither and thither by the bounding of the schooner.

Suddenly a dark form bounded across the deck, and like an agile cat it ran up the rigging, until another flash of lightning showed Carl Cameron near the fast-failing, but bold seaman.

Watching his chance, the brave youth threw a rope around the feet of the sailor, drew it up until it was under his arms, and then made it fast to the ragged butt of the topmast.

Realizing what was expected of him, the seaman instantly seized the rope with all his strength, there was a moment of suspense to the watchers below, and then a loud cheer, as they beheld their comrade saved from death.

The next act of Carl was to fish in the swinging topmast, which, after a number of unsuccessful efforts, and with the aid of his companion, he succeeded in doing, and was greeted with another loud cheer as he descended to the deck, while the captain, springing forward, seized his hand, and cried:

"Boy, your pluck will work you up to the quarter-deck yet, and—"

Another deep boom broke in upon the commander's words, and a solid shot flew above the schooner's deck.

"Ha! the brig is creeping up, and has us now on a lee shore. Forward there! Is there no man aboard who knows this coast?" and the captain's voice rang earnestly, for the danger to his vessel was great, with a storm raging around him, and a powerful enemy not two-thirds of a mile away.

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUNG PILOT.

"I know this coast, sir."

It was Carl Cameron who spoke, and quickly the captain turned toward him with:

"Ha! then we are saved, for you have the nerve to do it."

"What would you have me do, 'captain?'"

"Run us into some inlet on this coast, or behind some island, that we may double on yonder brig, which has persistently dogged us for two days."

"There is a long point of land putting off in this neighborhood, sir, and forming a bay at low tide, while at high water, vessels of light draught can run into an inlet beyond, and thus into the sea again."

"The very place. At what point on the coast is this bay you speak of, my man?" said the captain, eagerly.

"Just below the White Cliff beacon, sir."

"And that is now dead ahead. Are you a sailor, my lad?"

"I understand the management of a vessel, sir," modestly replied Carl.

"Good! Then take the wheel at once, and let us run for the bay you speak of," and the captain spoke earnestly, for the incessant lightning showed him that the brig was steadily drawing nearer to the schooner, her larger hull being less severely handled by the heavy seas, and giving her the advantage in the rough waters.

Carl Cameron took the wheel, and the captain stood at his side to aid him.

The excitement of the moment caused Carl to banish from his thoughts his own griefs, and with a firm hand and determination he entered upon his perilous duties, at once showing to the schooner's officers and crew that he was a sailor of no ordinary skill and nerve, in spite of his youth, while his rescue of the old coxswain was proof that he possessed daring beyond his years.

Shaking a reef out of the mainsail and foremost staysail, at the order of the young pilot, the crew soon discovered that the schooner was gaining on the brig, which still continued to watch a favorable chance, and ever and anon sent a shot after the flying craft, but fortunately without effect.

Into the cause of the schooner being chased by the brig, what was her nationality, or how read the commission of her commander, Carl did not inquire, but set to work to save her if possible, for her crew had saved him, and seeking the destruction of those who had done him a service was a powerful enemy, for which the gallant little craft was no match, either in size, number of men, or guns.

With tremendous force the schooner was driven through the rough waters, and at a pace that caused her to tremble violently, while ever and anon her lee bulwark would be buried beneath the waters as a heavy puff of wind would bear her down.

Soon the lightning became less frequent and vivid, and the clouds began to break away leaving the waning moon to shed its soft light over the troubled waters, and fall brightly upon the white sails of the brig, which was rapidly being left astern.

Then ahead of them loomed up threateningly a long, dark line, which all knew to be land, and the roar of the breakers sounded ominously in the ears of those on the schooner, who

knew how almost impossible it would be for their vessel to beat back out of danger, should the young pilot mistake the entrance to the bay.

But calmly stood Carl Cameron at the wheel, his bright eyes closely scanning the outline of the coast until suddenly his voice rang out with the order to ease off the main and jib-sheets, and letting the schooner fall off several points, she suddenly darted away directly before the wind.

Every eye turned upon the coast ahead, and then after a close scrutiny was bent upon the calm face of Carl Cameron, for not a break was anywhere visible in that long, dark line, and it looked as if they were running on to certain destruction.

Then the schooner's commander glanced over the waters toward the brig, and beheld that he was not any longer pursued, for the larger vessel dare not venture farther in shore.

Then, with his night-glass, the captain scanned the coast, and not a break was visible to his keen search, and somewhat anxiously he turned to his youthful pilot, and said:

"You are certain you are right, for the breakers are not a mile distant?"

"I am right, sir. Follow the direction I point, just off the starboard bow—there! do you not see a tall tree rising far above the horizon?"

"Yes, now I see it distinctly."

"Well, sir, that is my guide, and in ten minutes the schooner will be out of danger."

Notwithstanding the assurance of Carl, and his cool manner, all on board the schooner were most anxious, as they rapidly neared the coast, upon which the sea was hurled with mad fury and terrible roar, and the captain was about to give the order to put about and attempt to beat back in the face of the gale, when the sharp bows of the vessel bounded into a foaming cauldron of waters, which all believed breakers, and the ringing tones of the young pilot were heard, shouting forth the order:

"Haul in lively on the main-sheet and jib! Lively, men, and with a will. That's it, trim them flat as boards."

With relief at the order the crew had sprung to obey, while bringing the bows of the schooner up close, the swift vessel darted along, careering well over with the force of the wind, and running like a mad race-horse, for, sheltered by a long low point of land the youth had skillfully rounded, she was bounding along in comparatively smooth water.

Then there broke forth a loud, ringing cheer from officers and men, and Carl Cameron became the idol of the schooner's crew.

CHAPTER VIII.

CARL'S TEMPTATION.

Upon discovering, by the light of the moon, that the schooner was dashing along under the lee of an arm of the land, every one on board breathed more freely, and the captain warmly grasped Carl's hand, while he exclaimed:

"My gallant young friend, we took you from the waves, and one and all owe you our lives. Now, tell me, were you washed overboard from some vessel, that you were thus left adrift in the ocean?"

"No, captain. I was deliberately thrown into the sea, and by one I deemed my best friend, up to a short while ago; but of myself I will not speak more, and to you I owe thanks for my life;" and Carl spoke warmly.

"An accident saved your life, not I. But tell me, my boy, are you in need of a berth? If you are, I will make you an officer on board of my schooner."

"In what service are you engaged, captain?"

"Roving the wide seas for fortune; going wherever we please, and defending our lives and flag with the muzzles of our guns."

"And that flag is—"

"A blue field, with a pair of crimson swords crossed in the center," recklessly replied the captain, and then he continued: "To be candid with you, my young friend, I will tell you that this schooner was a privateer in the last war, and flaunted the Stars and Stripes at the peak; but we got into the service just as the Goddess of Peace waved her wand over the land and the sea, and we had no alternative but to lay the beautiful craft up to rot, unstained by blood or unchristened by battle, or haul down the American ensign, and—run up a *flag of our own!* As we expected to cruise fearlessly the blue seas, and our swords were to cross only in deadly combat the swords of all nations, I selected a blue field and our crimson-crossed sabers for our flag."

"I have heard of your schooner, sir. She is known as the Huntress," said Carl.

"She is."

"And is outlawed as a—"

"Steady, my boy—steady as you are—for I know you would call my beautiful vessel a harsh name. Yes, this is the Huntress, who has already bagged game enough to become known, and

has to fly from the vigorous cruisers of the ocean. The brig chasing us to-night drove us from a rich quarry—a merchant clipper-ship—and one of her shots cut off the head of my first officer. His position on the *Huntress* is vacant, and, boy though you are, I offer it to you, though I pray you never fill his shoes in the place to which he was hurried yesterday. Hold! do not speak from impulse, or you may decide unfavorably to yourself; but take until to-morrow to consider my offer, and then, if you do not care to remain with us, you are at liberty to go."

Without another word, the dashing, loquacious commander of the schooner turned on his heel, and walked forward, leaving Carl Cameron in a puzzled mind, for the offer made him was a tempting one, and he felt that he could not return to his own home, and the curse upon him seemed to burn into his very soul.

Still he struggled against the temptation, and the captain re-joining him, he said:

"I will tell you to-morrow my decision, sir. I need time for thought, though, Heaven knows, I have little to live for now. Will you anchor in the bay, sir, or run on over the bar?"

"What is the depth of water on the bar?"

"With this gale blowing the sea in, sir, at least thirteen feet. What does the schooner draw?"

"Twelve feet. We can make it, and doubtless we can hide away in the inlet for a day or two, eh?"

"Yes, sir; there are several islands in the inlet that will conceal the schooner. Shall we go on, sir, for yonder lies the bar?"

The captain glanced before him, and beheld a narrow opening in the forest, and toward this the schooner was headed.

Another look seaward showed him that the arm of the bay was becoming densely wooded, and that where he then was he could anchor securely; but in the inlet beyond he felt he would have a better chance of escape, should the brig, in the morning, follow him into the bay, and he said, quietly:

"Run on into the inlet."

As the point of land greatly sheltered the schooner from both the wind and the waves, she glided quietly along until her sharp bows were almost in the narrow opening, which, at low tide, was in fact in no channel-way; and, feeling their danger, should the vessel strike, the crew nervously and anxiously awaited the result.

But Carl Cameron was cool and confident, and with his hands firmly grasping the wheel, guided the beautiful vessel onward into the narrow opening through it, and out into the broad inlet beyond, where the waves dashed about in mimic imitation of the sea.

Heading for the other shore, a mile distant, Carl put the schooner before the wind, when he had approached within a cable's length of it, and after a run of half a league, rounded to, and came to anchor where several heavily wooded islands sheltered the vessel from the sea, and hid it from the main land.

CHAPTER IX.

BLOCKADED.

When the morning dawned, Carl Cameron ascended to the schooner's deck. In vain had he endeavored to hide his sorrows in sleep, for feverishly he tossed about in his hammock, which was slung in a state-room adjoining the captain's.

At length, the gray glimmer of dawn told him that daylight was at hand, and he ascended to the deck, and cast his eyes about him.

The spot to which he had piloted the vessel was well known to him, for often had he run his own yacht there among the bevy of islands that dotted the center of the inlet, forming a small bay within their circle.

Seven miles distant, over the bar, and on the other side of the bay, lay Sea Vista Homestead, which then sheltered the dead body of Oscar Cameron, slain by his hand, and the man who had endeavored to take his life—ay, and the mother who had driven him an exile from home, influenced as she was by her wicked husband.

"Mother will miss me, I know," he murmured, "for I have ever been a dutiful son to her, and he will often see me in his dreaming hours, and a horrid specter I will be to guard his slumbers. Well, it will be believed by all that remorse caused me to take my own life, and the ingenious stories of Hugh Cameron will cover Oscar's memory with honor—mine with dishonor. And thus one half of the world is deceived by the other half. Ah me, I am young to thus grapple with the sorrows and the trials of life; but I must be brave and strong—ay, strong to bear, for there is much for me to do. With the papers now in my possession I could return and prove the plot of Hugh Cameron and his son to defraud me of my just inheritance, and I could prove that he attempted to take my life; yes, and his own confession made known that my father died by his hand.

"Ha, ha! Hugh Cameron, I see your plot now, and woe to you when my vengeance falls upon you. Did my mother not idolize you, did I not fear it would break her heart to know you were false—ay, a murderer—I would return and expose you; but she protects you, and I will bide my time until a future day of judgment.

"Oh! mine will be a bitter life. Ha! I have here the power to bring Hugh Cameron to justice—the rude justice of the sea; but no, I must wait—wait—wait. Yet must I sin, must I league myself with pirates? True, the world has dealt me hard blows, and I have little joy in life, and my whole object now is revenge on that man; but I see not why I should sin; stain my name and my conscience deliberately. No, I will take this schooner as a means of leaving this land, and then leave her and her crew, for I have money, thank Heaven! enough to support me for years, and the same that I refused to give to poor Oscar, and which cost him his life."

Thus meditating Carl Cameron paced the quarter-deck to and fro, until suddenly he beheld by his side the same youth who had joined him in the cabin the night before.

Catching the eye of Carl the boy sprang forward, and impulsively grasping his hand, said earnestly:

"Ah, sir, I have to thank you so much, so much,"

"And what for, can I ask?" said Carl, smiling at his earnest manner.

"For running the schooner, sir; for the men say we would have gone down had it not been for you, and they wish you to be our officer, sir, for the captain said you were to be."

"Indeed! it is kind of the men, my boy. But what is your name, please tell me?" and Carl gazed admiringly into the handsome face of the boy.

"I am called Leo, sir; but my other name I dare not tell you, for if I did I would die."

"Why, Leo, you certainly cannot believe there is harm in telling me your name? But I will not ask you."

"No, sir, please do not; for I would tell you anything, it seems, and I love you for saving the schooner, for if we had been lost, she would never have been found."

"She! to whom do you refer, Leo?" asked Carl, interested by the mysterious manner of the boy.

"That is a secret, too, sir; but some day, even if I do die, as he said I would, I will tell you all, for I want so much to tell you. The captain knows something about it, and he promised me he would find her for me; but he may not keep his word, and then he is cross to me sometimes."

"What is the captain's name, Leo?"

"We call him Captain Lyndon, sir."

"Is he an American?"

"I do not know, sir. The men say he is an Englishman; anyhow I know he hates the English."

"Are you an American, Leo?"

"I do not think I am, sir; once I had a happy home, but it is far, very far from here."

"Poor boy! how long have you been on the schooner?"

"Six months, sir; before that we were on a private vessel, and—"

"Well, my young friend, you are up early, I see," cried the voice of Captain Lyndon, and at his coming Leo slipped quickly away.

"Yes, sir; and I see the storm has blown itself out."

"Yes, but the waves still run high, and the breeze is a stiff one. Can you get a glimpse seaward from here, for I am anxious to see what has become of the brig?"

"We can go ashore on yonder island, sir, and from the other side we can gain a view up and down the coast, and into the bay through which we passed last night."

"Good. Mr. Raymond, be good enough to call my gig to the gangway, and then set the men to work upon rigging a new topmast, which that cursed Englishman deprived us of last night," and the captain turned to one of the officers, who instantly gave the order.

In a few moments more the gig was alongside, and the captain and Carl were pulling rapidly for the island, the former remarking as they went along:

"This is a most secluded retreat you brought me into. By the way, what is your name?"

Carl's face flushed, for he cared not to give his name to the commander of the schooner, and a shudder crept over him as he recalled the curse upon it, bestowed by Hugh Cameron, for, brave youth though he was, he could not but feel a superstitious horror at being thus accursed, and in those days, kind reader, the age had not advanced above the folly of superstition, as it has to-day.

It flashed through his mind then to take the name of his mother before her marriage, and after hesitating an instant, he replied:

"Call me, St. Vane, sir."

"I'll call you anything you please—St. Vane, certainly; but methinks that is not your cognomen in the log of life, yet it matters not what you call a man. 'A rose by any other name,' you know. Well, here we are at the island."

And as the boat touched the beach, the captain and the youth sprang ashore.

A walk of five minutes through the thick forest that covered the island brought them to a view of the ocean, the mouth of the inlet, the bay upon the other side of the bar, and the plantation-dotted coast above, with Sea Vista in the distance.

But an exclamation of surprise and a smothered curse broke from Captain Lyndon's lips as he glanced seaward.

The sight he saw was the brig-of-war lying off the inlet, and not half a mile from her a large frigate, also flying the English flag, while the two were passing signals that boded no good to the little schooner.

"Blockaded, by the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Captain Lyndon, turning his glass upon his enemies. "But the Huntress will reach the sea, or sink with her colors flying."

CHAPTER X.

THREATENING MANEUVERS.

After watching the movements of the frigate and brig for some moments, Captain Lyndon felt convinced that they were aware of the presence of the schooner in the inlet, and he at once dispatched the coxswain of the gig back to the Huntress, with orders to Mr. Raymond to hasten on the repairs and have the vessel put at once in the best fighting trim.

Then he again turned his attention to the English cruiser, and asked the youth, whom I must now call St. Vane, the name that Carl had chosen to be known by:

"Is there water enough for yonder vessel to enter this inlet?"

"Yes, sir; especially now while the wind comes from the sea and the tide continues so high."

"Then we will have to run the gauntlet out to sea, or be sunk by the frigate."

"No, sir; the frigate and the brig can neither of them come up as far as these islands, or within half a mile of them; but they can send their boats, and we'll have to run back through the channel through the bay and inlet. See there!"

As St. Vane spoke, the brig suddenly stood away from the frigate, heading for the entrance to the Sea Vista Bay, and from her bows came a white puff of smoke.

"She is signaling for a pilot to enter the bay."

"Yes, sir; but she will not get one, as the only person who could bring her in, beside myself, is in yonder mansion, and he'll never answer the call."

"That is good. But tell me, could the brig not be run in and anchor over in the far part of the bay, where I see a schooner yacht and a sloop at anchor? Then if we had to run out through the way we came last night, she would be bagged; for without a pilot she could not follow us, and it would be a chance shot if she hit us."

"True, sir, but the frigate would be outside."

"No, St. Vane, the frigate could be also piloted into the inlet, and anchored in a position where she dare not move without a pilot."

"How about the man that would bring her in?"

"Oh, I see you do not understand me. Listen. Last night I took you out of the ocean, where some enemy had left you to die, you say; but into that I do not inquire. Thus I saved your life, and in return you saved the schooner, and did it nobly, too; but we are now again in danger, and the Huntress and her eighty gallant defenders depend upon you—nay, plead with you to save them."

"I will do all in my power, Captain Lyndon, and in return I ask that you land me at the first foreign port you touch."

"I'll do it—I swear it, and you shall have a round sum for —"

"I do not need your money, sir; but I will ask you to carry me away from this land, and, thanking you for your kind offer to make me an officer of the Huntress, I must decline, for, frankly speaking, I cannot ally myself to infamy."

"Strong terms, boy; but we will not quarrel—that I trust you what I am now about to say will prove, for you will have it in your power to betray me to the yard-arm for a gallows."

"I would not betray an enemy even, sir, and certainly you have been my friend."

"Well spoken, Now, St. Vane, I know your skill as a pilot, and—hark! How yonder brig calls for one."

"Well, sir."

"Go out to the brig and bring her to an anchorage upon the other side of the bay—"

"I am listening, sir," said St. Vane, as the outlaw captain paused, as if to mark the effect of his words.

"Then go out to the frigate and run her into an anchorage in the inlet, and in such a position as to keep the islands between the schooner and her huge enemy, so that we can dash over the bar without coming in range of her guns, which would sink us in ten minutes. Then with an excuse that you must return to the brig—or, tell your own story, I leave that to you—come away from the frigate, and by the time you reach the schooner I'll have all ready for fight, and we'll just slide away from here and outwit the two hated cruisers at their own game. Now, what say you, St. Vane?"

The youth was silent a moment, and then said:

"Captain Lyndon, I'll not desert you, sir. For worlds of wealth I would not longer remain here, and the schooner shall reach the sea if in my power to aid her. I will go on board the Huntress, and perhaps you can rig me out in a midshipman's uniform."

"Certainly. I have as many disguises as a belle has fashionable dresses; but what is your plan?"

"In a small cove of this island is a dingy that once belonged to an American man-of-war. I picked the little boat up, it having drifted into the inlet some months ago, and I left it in the cove to use for hunting ducks in. Now I will go on board the schooner, rig out as an American midshipman, and then sail out in the dingy to the brig, professing to be an officer at home on leave."

"The very thing; but come, let us hasten, for the brig is raising a terrible row with her guns, and some pilot might go out to her," said Captain Lyndon, anxiously.

"There is only one that can go, and I feel assured he will not do so—no, he has too much to occupy him at home," sadly returned St. Vane.

And in a short while after he was in the cabin of the schooner, rigging himself out in the uniform of a midshipman in the navy of the United States, in which disguise he intended to risk his life on board two English vessels-of-war.

CHAPTER XI.

BOARDED BY A PILOT.

The brig-of-war that had so persistently chased the Huntress was a splendid specimen of naval architecture, being of a graceful model that combined speed and sea-worthiness in a remarkable degree, while her spars and rigging were as trim as a racing yacht's.

Her decks were in perfect order, showed thorough discipline, and were armed by a battery of fifteen guns, with a crew of a hundred and fifty men.

As she stood in toward the entrance to the bay, not daring to enter, however, her bow-gun pealed forth its loud call for a pilot, which seemed to bring no answer, to the great chagrin of an elderly officer who stood upon the quarter-deck, narrowly scanning the shores through his glass.

"It is strange, very strange, some pilot does not put off. I expect our Yankee cousins do not feel friendly enough to us to desire to aid us," he said, turning to a young officer, dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant in the British service.

"No, my lord, I expect they feel sore; but still they might aid us in the capture of a pirate," replied the lieutenant, who was a dashing, handsome fellow of thirty, perhaps, with brown hair, dark eyes, and a form of which he might well feel proud, while his face was noble and daring, proving that the decorations he wore upon his left breast had been honestly won in some desperate service.

His companion and commander was Lord Elgin Eubank, a man every inch a gentleman and a sailor, and in whose fine face rested a look of sadness, as though his life had been one of sorrow.

Dressed in a captain's uniform, his breast was also bespangled with dazzling orders bestowed for gallant services.

But his brow became clouded as the continued roar of his gun brought no pilot from the shore.

"I am almost tempted to run in. Ha! Estelle, my daughter, the guns have awakened you," and Captain Lord Elgin Eubank turned toward a maiden who just then approached him, coming from the cabin entrance.

"Yes, father, I thought at first you had overhauled the swift schooner, until my maid told me you were signaling for a pilot," and Estelle Eubank bowed kindly to the young officer, Lieutenant Bradford Brandt.

Estelle was scarcely more than eighteen, and lovely in face and form to a perfection seldom seen combined, while her every expression was the reflection of a pure and noble heart.

"Is not that a boat, sir, coming out to the brig?" asked the maiden, after a glance shoreward, and she pointed to a spot under the shelter of the land, where a small boat had just come out of the entrance to the bay, and with its small sail reefed down, was boldly standing out into the rough waters.

"By Jove, you are right, Estelle; your eyes are as keen as an eagle's."

"Yes, that must be the pilot, for the boat contains but one occupant."

"Why are you going to enter the bay, father? and Nannie also told me that the Bellerophon was near us."

"Yes, yonder she is off the inlet. We intend to run in and hunt that schooner out of his lair, for the saucy craft certainly stood into this bay last night," and thus replying, Lord Elgin again turned his attention to the little boat, which came rapidly out toward the brig, and was managed in the rough sea in a manner that won the praise of all that were watching its progress from on board the Sea Racer, as the English vessel was called.

"The Bellerophon is signaling, sir," suddenly said Bradford Brandt, and turning toward the frigate they read the signals.

"If two pilots board you, send one here; if only one let him come out to us and run us into the inlet as soon as you are anchored. The pirate is certainly in the inlet, as we see his top-masts above the trees."

"By the Lord Harry, but we have at last caught that bold sea-robber. Answer the frigate, 'All right,' Mr. Brandt," and Lord Elgin seemed really delighted at the prospect of getting into his power a craft that had for six months been a terror to the English merchant flag in American waters.

In the meantime the small sail-boat had approached within hailing distance, and Bradford Brandt called out:

"Ahoy the boat! Do you come as a pilot?"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the ringing voice of St. Vane, as he rounded to under the lee of the brig.

A moment more, and he stood on the quarter-deck, clad in a midshipman's uniform that fitted him well, and displayed his fine form to perfection.

Observing at a glance that he had not to deal with a common fisherman of the coast, as he had expected, and recognizing in the youth an officer of the United States Navy, as he believed, Lord Elgin stepped forward politely, and said:

"This is her majesty's brig-of-war, Sea Racer, sir, and I am Lord Elgin Eubank, her commander. Do I understand, sir, that in you I find a pilot?"

"Yes, sir; there are no pilots along this coast, and I concluded to run out and carry you in, if you desired it," quietly responded St. Vane, his eyes falling admiringly, and yet timidly, upon the face of Estelle, while he addressed her father.

"It was kind of you, sir; you are doubtless at home on leave?"

"My home is on this coast, sir, and at present I am on leave from my vessel. You are in pursuit of a pirate schooner, I believe?"

"Yes, sir; do you know ought of her?"

"Yes, sir; she ran into the bay last night, and is now concealed by the islands beyond."

"Ha! then she is in our power."

"I will take the wheel, Lord Elgin, whenever you are ready, sir."

St. Vane seemed anxious to proceed, seeing which the Englishman inquired his name, and again the youth colored as he gave his assumed one, and bowed low at the introduction to Estelle and Lieutenant Brandt, and was then conducted to his position by the nobleman, who seemed strangely struck with his amateur pilot's handsome face and courtly manner.

CHAPTER XII.

A DARING GAME TO PLAY.

Had the two cruisers been American vessels, perhaps St. Vane might have felt some compunction in planning against them for the escape of a pirate craft.

But as they were English, and only a few months before had been bitter enemies of his country, not to speak of the kind regard he felt toward the schooner for saving him from death, and also being a means of his escape from the home he now almost hated, the youth determined to bravely do his best for his outlaw friend, and he took the wheel of the Sea Racer, and at once stood on toward the entrance to the bay, which was by no means easy of egress and ingress.

The wind was still blowing half a gale almost, and the brig bowled swiftly along, the eye of every officer and seaman upon the youthful pilot, whose face was calm, confident, and strangely stern for one so young.

Another there was also who gazed upon the handsome face of St. Vane, and with eyes that watched him with deepest interest, not only on account of his striking appearance, but for his cool, decided manner of handling the brig, and the ringing, stern voice in which his orders were given, all showing him a thorough seaman, and one utterly fearless.

That other was Estelle Eubank, and she took her stand near

the wheel, and closely watched the maneuvers of the boy pilot, for the sea yet ran high, the waves fell with heavy roar upon the beach, and the breeze drove the vessel along at race-horse speed.

"She minds her helm well, Lord Elgin, so I will run her in until I am abreast the point, and then jibe her; it is better than standing on to the breakers and going about, for if she misses stays we might not have room to work her," and St. Vane spoke with a nonchalant manner that convinced the nobleman and Bradford Brandt that the brig was in safe hands, youthful though they were.

"You are the best judge, Mr. St. Vane, and allow me to say sir, that you handle a vessel like an old sailor."

"Thank you, sir," quietly responded the youth, and he gave a few orders about taking in sail, and the next moment the bow of the brig was in the foaming cauldron just off the point of land.

It was a nervous moment for both officers and crew of the brig, for going at such a terrible rate of speed should she strike they well knew she would go to pieces almost instantly.

Upon their left was the point of land, a long sandy bar gradually running into a low hill covered with a recent growth of trees, through which was the narrow channel that the schooner had passed into the inlet by the night before, and which, at low tide, was a mere ditch, or canal, only a few feet in depth and twenty in depth.

Directly ahead of the brig was a high cliff, against which the waves dashed with fury; between this and the point opposite was about three hundred feet.

As there was a reef running out from the cliff into the bay for several cables' lengths, it was necessary to keep close along the point, as soon as the entrance had been made, ere the brig could stretch across the open basin.

Thus it will be seen that the young pilot had a dangerous gauntlet to run into the bay, in the then wild condition of the sea, and especially so the night before when he had carried the schooner in; but the tall tree on the cliff had been his beacon, and from his earliest boyhood he had sailed his yacht in and out of the channel, and also the schooner pleasure craft belonging to Hugh Cameron.

As the bow of the brig entered the foaming waters, hurled back from their contact with the cliff, St. Vane put his helm rapidly to the starboard, and the Sea Racer swept round, as though on a pivot, until her mizzen and storm sails fluttered wildly as they lost their wind, and then filled upon the other quarter with a report like a cannon.

In the meantime the Sea Racer's bows, which had momentarily threatened to lance the cliff with her sharp bowsprit, had come up until she lay broadside to the point, and bending gracefully to the breeze, she bounded along through the more quiet waters of the bay.

Rounding the reef, St. Vane stood on until he gained a position nearly abreast of Sea Vista, and a mile from the entrance to the bay, and coming up into the wind the anchors were let fall, and the brig was at rest for a while.

Ere Lord Elgin could say aught to the youth about the desire of the frigate to enter the inlet, St. Vane remarked:

"Can I offer my services to the Bellerophon as pilot, sir, for the inlet should be guarded?"

"Indeed you can, sir; I hardly dared ask it of you, Mr. St. Vane, after your goodness to me, but I assure you that your name shall be honorably mentioned to my government for the handsome manner you have aided it."

"You are very kind, my lord; I will at once board the frigate, sir," quietly responded St. Vane.

"Not until you have taken a glass of wine with me, sir, and then I am going to request that you return to the brig as my guest; and if we have to take the schooner with our boats, Mr. St. Vane, you shall have the command of one."

St. Vane bowed his thanks for the honor, declined the glass of wine, and refusing the offer of a boat's crew to take him on board the frigate, bade adieu to his new acquaintances and was soon in his dingy swiftly flying across the bay, and heading for the channel through which to pass into the inlet and stand out to the frigate.

As he sailed along, he congratulated himself upon the manner in which he had been enabled to avoid all questions in which he would have to depart from the truth, for he was young in deceit, and most anxious to remain above deception.

A half-hour's sail carried him through the channel into the inlet, and well toward the frigate, which stood off and on, as though awaiting his coming.

As he passed near the islands on the starboard tack, he keenly surveyed the foliage, and beheld the buccaneer chief anxiously watching him, and a wave from a handkerchief showed that Captain Lyndon was pleased with the performance of his perilous duty thus far.

With a sigh at the part he was playing, St. Vane stood on, and in another half hour was on the decks of the English frigate, and confronted by her stern old commander.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RUSE SUCCESSFUL.

"My guns were a signal for a pilot. You appear in the uniform of an American officer, sir."

Such was the abrupt and stern greeting the youth received from the old commander of the frigate, but he replied, quietly:

"My uniform has nothing to do with my skill as a pilot, sir. I came to run the Bellerophon into a position where she can command the inlet."

"Do the pilots on this coast rank and uniform as officers of the navy?"

"Not that I am aware of. There are no pilots on this coast, and I answered your signals simply because, as a resident on the land, I know these waters well. If you prefer a man in a pea-jacket or oil-skin, I'll retire, sir."

St. Vane spoke politely, but in a manner that showed he was not to be brow-beaten, even by an English commodore; and recognizing at last what he supposed to be the real state of affairs, the old officer changed his tone, and said:

"Pardon me, young sir; I could not at first understand an American officer coming out as a pilot to an English vessel."

"There is a pirate schooner in the inlet, sir, that you are doubtless in pursuit of, and as no American vessel was near, I determined to answer your signals, and an hour since I piloted the brig to an anchorage in the bay."

"Again I ask pardon, sir, and if you will pilot the frigate in, you will certainly confer a great favor, for the pirate craft hidden in yonder has given us a great deal of trouble."

The youth made no reply, and ten minutes after took his stand near the wheel, and headed the majestic vessel toward the mouth of the inlet.

It looked like open sailing, but there were bars to avoid, and shallow water to shun; but calmly the young pilot guided the huge frigate, until in half an hour she rounded to and came to anchor in a position that placed a chain of wooded islands between her and the channel leading into the bay.

"From this position nothing can escape out of the inlet by the entrance without coming under your guns, sir," said St. Vane, leaving the wheel.

"True, sir, true; and if the schooner wishes to be sunk, she has but to try to run out. Now, sir, I have to thank you sincerely for your kindness; and as we have to fight the pirate with our boats, I would be glad if you would accept the command of one and lead the way."

"I thank you, commodore, but Lord Elgin has placed one of his boats at my disposal. Would you send him any word?" quietly responded St. Vane.

"Yes, yes; tell him to come at once to the frigate with his attacking force, and he shall have what men he wishes, for, as the schooner is his quarry, we must yield to him the command."

Declining all offers of hospitality, the youth went over the side into his dingy, and at once stood off on the port tack, which would carry him across the inlet, and between two of the islands.

The position of the two English vessels was now just what was to be desired for the safety of the schooner, as the frigate lay in a position where her guns could not reach her, when the Huntress made for the channel between the inlet and the bay, and a mile from the narrow passage-way was anchored the brig, and if she opened fire upon the pirate it would only be a moment or two ere the fugitive stood around the cliff on the other shore and out of range.

Then, ere the brig could up anchor and give chase, the schooner could have gained an offing, and neither vessel could follow her to sea without a pilot unless they were willing to take the chances of going ashore.

A mile up the inlet, anchored in the group of islands, was the schooner, ready at the instant to spread her wings and fly away.

After leaving the frigate the youth stood on toward a narrow channel between two islands, and as soon as he passed through and was no longer visible from the decks of the Bellerophon, he gibed his sail over to the starboard, let her run out free, and scudded away in the direction of the schooner.

A run of fifteen minutes and he ran into the island-locked basin, and sprang upon the deck of the Huntress, where he was met by Captain Lyndon and greeted with a suppressed cheer from the men.

"Well, my noble young friend, you have saved us; but you are as wet as a drowned rat from the sea breaking over you. Go

down into the cabin and tell Léo to give you a new uniform my first lieutenant never christened—he was just your size."

"Yes, sir, I'll follow your advice, for I feel chilled; in the meantime stand out of here with the schooner, and head directly for the channel, and I will be up by the time you get there. You must be in a hurry, captain, as the tide is running out, and in half an hour you will not have water enough on the channel bar."

So saying, the youth descended into the cabin, and when he ascended to the deck, twenty minutes after, he beheld a sight that filled him with horror, and almost deprived him of the power of action.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCHOONER'S FLIGHT.

Acting upon the advice of St. Vane, Captain Lyndon had immediately shaken the reefs out of his canvas and spread the mainsail, foresail, foremast staysail and jib, and the anchor being apeak, the swift schooner bent to the twelve-knot breeze, and with the lee-rail cutting the waves, darted along on the port tack directly for the narrow channel leading into the bay, keeping her sails trimmed close so as to hold well into the wind's eye.

Within twenty minutes the channel opened before her, and Captain Lyndon felt a short while more would bring him under the fire of the brig, while the frigate having discovered his flight, as he sped by between two islands, had lowered her boats and sent them in hot pursuit, at the same time training her guns up, to fire at the slender spars seen flying along above the tree-tops.

Five minutes more and the channel would be reached, and Captain Lyndon was about to order a man to go after St. Vane, when suddenly out of the narrow passage-way between the inlet and bay darted a launch filled with seamen, while following in its wake were two cutters, also heavily manned.

They were the boats of the brig going to the frigate to get reinforcements to attack the schooner, and their sudden coming upon the Huntress was a great surprise, for the wooded neck of land had hidden her before from their view.

Instantly all was excitement on both sides, and the clear voice of Captain Lyndon rang out:

"Boarders ahoy! Repel boarders!"

Instantly his men acted with promptness, seizing their pikes and cutlasses, while their commander sprang to the wheel and headed directly for the launch just as there came a terrible broadside from the frigate, firing blindly over the treetops at the topmasts of the schooner, and the iron hail crashed and shrieked through the foliage in its mad flight.

It was just at this moment that St. Vane, dressed as a pirate lieutenant, stepped on deck, and with horror beheld the launch just ahead of the schooner's sharp bows, which must strike her amidships and cut her in two, for no earthly power could save the fated boat and its human cargo.

Then he sprang to action, with every nerve and muscle strung to its utmost; for in the stern sheets of the launch, seated beside her father, sat Estelle Eubank, calm, but pale as death.

Bounding forward, the youth sprang out upon the bowsprit, leaned down, and, just as the sharp bows crashed through the doomed launch, seized the form of Estelle in his strong arm, and drew her up from death, while amid shrieks and groans, a crash of timber, stern orders, and curses, the Huntress passed on, leaving behind her a score of struggling beings, and the water tinged with human blood.

At first the youth thought Estelle was dead, for she lay insensible in his arms; but a deep sigh passed her lips, and her eyes opened just as he laid her down upon a settee upon the quarter-deck, and the outlaw captain's stern voice cried:

"Cut clean in two, by Heaven! and a fair prisoner to boot. Well done, St. Vane!"

"My father! my poor father!" cried Estelle, the sound of a strange voice arousing her, and springing to her feet, she glanced astern, and a cry of joy escaped her as she saw her father raised from the water by Bradford Brandt, and drawn into the cutter, for the other two boats of the brig, at once set to work trying to save their comrades, seeing the utter impossibility of checking the flight of the schooner.

"Father! father! help me, oh, save me!" rang the piteous cry across the waters, and Lord Elgin beheld his beautiful daughter a captive upon the decks of a pirate craft, and loud his orders rang out to give chase, just as half a dozen of the frigate's boats came rapidly up, but dare not fire upon the flying schooner for fear of killing Estelle, for her fair form was visible to every eye.

"Lady, be calm, no danger will befall you here, I pledge you," and St. Vane spoke quietly, while a flush of shame mantled his face.

"You here! You an outlaw?"

The words, the manner of Estelle, as her eyes fell upon the youth, clad in a pirate uniform, caused him to turn deadly pale, and cut him to the heart. But ere he could make reply, the stern voice of Captain Lyndon recalled him to the danger of the schooner, which was now within half her length of the narrow channel leading into the bay.

CHAPTER XV.

A FATAL SHOT.

Seizing the wheel with promptness and nerve, St. Vane let the bows of the schooner fall off until they pointed into the channel, and, then holding her steady, she rushed through the narrow passage, with the boats of the frigate and brig in full pursuit; the men pulling with terrible force to overtake the daring craft.

But the Huntress possessed wonderful speed, and with the wind blowing half a gale, and her masts crowded with canvas, she rushed through the waters at a rate that distanced the boats, and forging out into the bay, trimmed close, set her topsail to catch every atom of breeze over the treetops on the neck of land, and headed directly for the opening between the cliff and the point through which she had to pass to gain the open sea.

That she was discovered from the brig, a mile away, was evident, but they did not fire upon her until the boats were seen darting out of the channel in pursuit, for they had believed her already taken.

Then, to the horror of Lord Elgin, his vessel opened a hot fire upon the schooner, and one shot carried away her foretopmast.

Still on the Huntress rushed, and in vain did Lord Elgin, Bradford Brandt, and others in the boat signal to the brig to cease firing, for fear harm might befall Estelle—they saw not, or heeded not the signals, and another shot struck the quarter-deck and at once a great excitement was visible on the schooner's decks.

But the fatal shot had not injured Estelle, or the daring youth who stood at the helm of the Huntress—no, it had cut down the outlaw captain, who fell to the deck, his left arm torn away.

"No, let me lie here. I would not be cramped in the close cabin—to your posts, men, for you are not yet out of the reach of the gallows," said the brave, but misguided man, and in obedience to his orders the boy Leo brought pillows from the cabin, and propped him up, while the schooner's surgeon dressed his wound, at the same time shaking his head ominously.

As for St. Vane he still held the wheel firmly, and his ringing voice soon sent men up to the foretop to clear away the wrecked topmast, while he bent his gaze searchingly upon the channel before him.

A few more shots from the brig, which was rapidly raising her anchor, and setting sail, to stand down to the boats, and the Huntress had gained the shelter of the cliff, and was darting through the channel to the sea, at a speed that caused the crew to hold their breath with dread.

Having passed the point, and forged ahead into the very edge of the breakers, the young helmsman's voice rang out with orders to put about, and as though on a pivot the schooner came round, her sails flapping loudly, then filling with a loud boom, and bending her down to her work on the other tack, she shot ahead like a rocket.

But a few cables' length did St. Vane stand on this tack when he cried:

"Hard a-starboard!"

Quickly the Huntress went about, just as the sharp bowsprit of the brig was visible around the cliff, and thus, still keeping the headland between them, the schooner rushed seaward, plowing through the rough waves, and burying her sharp nose deep as her tremendous pressure of canvas forced her through the waters.

In the meantime a strange scene was being enacted upon the quarter-deck of the Huntress, where lay her dashing commander, his life ebbing away from the wound he had received.

Well he knew that he must die, and also realizing the fact, but with her woman's heart touched at his suffering, Estelle Eubank came forward, and bending over him, said softly:

"Can I do ought to relieve you, sir?"

The pirate chief started, his face turned even more palid, and his voice trembled as he asked:

"Girl, in the name of Heaven, who are you?"

Then for the first time since she had been dragged aboard the schooner so strangely by St. Vane, he looked full into her face, and what he beheld there seemed to bring up some bitter memory from a buried past, and again he asked:

"Girl, who are you?"

"Would you know my name, sir? it is Estelle Eubank."

"Good Heaven! You are the daughter of Lord Elgin Eubank?"

"I am, sir. Do you know my father?" asked Estelle, with an interest awakened in the man before her which she could not account for.

"Know him? Know Lord Elgin Eubank? None knew him better than I; but I must hasten and make a confession to you, for death has his merciless clutch upon me, and he is an enemy that will never let go. Here, Raymond."

And the voice of the dying chief rang out with his wonted energy.

"Ay, ay, sir," and the pirate lieutenant drew near.

"Take the wheel, and let yonder youth come here, and see that no one else crowds my dying hours, for I have much to say ere I slip my cable for Satan's cruising ground. Where is the boy, Leo?" he called out, after a reckless laugh at his own words.

"I am here, Captain Lyndon."

And Leo knelt beside him just as St. Vane approached and said, sadly:

"I am sorry to see you wounded, captain; but I hope——"

"Hope! What hope have I? Boy," addressing St. Vane, "I sent for you to tell you that I leave you in command of this schooner, and you deserve to be her master, because you have saved her. Hold! here me through; the men idolize you, they know your pluck, for they've seen you tried, and though Raymond and Gaultney are good officers, they have not the dash needed to command the crew on this deck, or to guide the destinies of a pirate craft, so to you I will the schooner—but upon one condition."

"And that is, captain?" said St. Vane, quietly, for a sudden thought flashed across his mind, and he determined to take command of the schooner should the captain die, which was a certainty.

"That you go on a cruise of justice, one that will gladden many hearts, for it will atone for one of my blackest crimes. Will you take command, and fulfill my dying request?"

"I will."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PIRATE'S CONFESSION.

"Now that you have made me that promise, I can die with a better conscience, for I know you will keep it," and the chief held forth his hand, and it was grasped by the youth most warmly.

Then, in a low, but distinct voice, the chief said:

"Before you three I would make a confession, unfold to you a bitter page of my past life, and that I might not die with this sin upon my conscience, Heaven has so ordered it that this maiden was brought here to see my last hours, and you were directed to fulfill my last wish."

With strange surprise Estelle gazed upon the outlaw, for how could she be interested in the past life of a pirate leader. After a pause Captain Lyndon continued:

"Let me first say that I am not an American, but an Englishman, born in one of the grandest old homesteads of England. Unmindful of the teachings of a fond mother, the advice of a noble father, I early in life became a wild and reckless youth, and my extravagant career—nay, my life of crime, for my hand took the life of a comrade ere I was twenty years of age—brought down a sorrow upon my poor mother, which carried her to her grave. Flying from my home to escape punishment, I returned after many years to find my father dead, and his only remaining child, my elder brother, in possession of the title and all the wealth of our name. From that moment I hated him—ay, I longed for his death—and no one knowing of my presence in England, for I was disguised, I attempted his life, firing at him, as he sat at supper one night, through an open window——"

"Why, sir, this is a strange story you are telling, for my father had a brother who once attempted his life, and——"

"Hear me through, girl, and then draw your conclusions," interrupted the chief, and then he continued, while the pallor momentarily increased upon his features, and a look of anguish swept over his face. "I failed to take his life, though he lingered long upon the brink of the grave; but at last recovered, and I had to fly from England, for it was discovered in some way that I was the would-be assassin."

"Still my vengeance was not satisfied, and becoming one of a band of free rovers, I worked my way up until I obtained command of a good vessel, and visiting England again, I struck a blow upon my brother from which he never recovered. I kidnapped two of his children, a son and daughter; they were twins, and—— Ha! I see that this fair young girl here now knows that I am her uncle."

"Yes, now I know that you are Lyndon Eubank, my father's own brother, and may Heaven have mercy on you! But tell me, for the love of Heaven, tell me, Lyndon Eubank, where are my little brother and sister?" and Estelle clasped her hands imploringly, and knelt beside the dying man, who said, softly:

"Rise, Estelle; do not kneel to one like me, and be glad, for harm has not befallen them. Flora is now far South, and—and——"

"And what——"

"Your brother Leo kneels there."

One glance into the boy's face, the eyes of sister and brother met, and though eight years had passed since they last had seen each other, they felt that the dying man told the truth, and at once they were clasped in each other's arms.

At the sight a look of real joy passed over the pale, hard face of the chief, and a silence of some moments fell upon all, as the stanch schooner, still bound seaward, leaving far behind her the shores of America, and the foiled brig and frigate vainly endeavoring to find their way through the dangerous channels leading out into deep water, that they might pursue their daring enemy to the bitter end.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DEATH AT SEA.

When her joy at again meeting her brother had somewhat subsided, Estelle again turned toward the chief, and her voice was tremulous as she said:

"From my heart I forgive you now, and I could pray that you might live to repent of your past life, and gladly would my father forgive and forget the past. But tell me, what of poor Flora?"

"When I visited England to take my revenge upon Elgin, I believed him absent in his ship, and was surprised to find his vessel anchored near me the next morning, so I sent an old seaman—my second officer—on shore after the three children. He returned at night with only Flora and Leo, having surprised them in the park bordering the river bank. Then I sailed rapidly away, and upon an island known to old Pinto, who is a Spaniard, I determined to establish my rendezvous, and commence a war against English commerce on the high seas.

"Upon that island lived Leo and Flora for four years, with old Pinto and his wife, and then I took the boy aboard ship with me, to further the revenge against my brother, by bringing his son up a pirate.

"The war breaking out between England and the United States, I received a commission as a privateersman in the American service, that government believing me to be a wealthy ship-owner, desirous of taking a hand in the war. The prize-money I obtained, I devoted to the building of this schooner, which was launched too late to do much service, as the war was at an end, so I turned again to piracy against English commerce, for, an outlaw from my native land, I hated it and my people. My late captures on this coast, brought the brig upon my heels, and——"

"Tell me, please, of poor Flora."

"True, Estelle, you see that my cable is slipping rapidly away, and ere death anchors my tongue, you would know the secret. Well, I do not blame you, poor girl! St. Vane, I have not long to live, have I?"

"I fear your end is at hand, captain, and from my heart I feel for you."

"I know it, boy—I know it; and ere I go, I will clear your character in the eyes of Estelle here. Now, listen to me, for upon you depends the finding of Flora, and I desire you to run down to the island rendezvous, where old Pinto yet lives, carrying on a smuggling business with Vera Cruz and Cuba, since he left the deck of my vessel. The island is one of the Arcas, which are, as you may know, three islands, or keys, lying so as to form a triangle, and where there is a fair anchorage. Pinto dwells upon the northern Arca, and his family, consisting of his wife, two daughters, older than Flora, and three sons, who are the crew of his smuggling schooner.

"As old Pinto is an exile from Spain, he prefers to live there to any other spot, bleak as it is, and sometimes turns a dishonest penny by displaying false beacons on the islands.

"If Flora is safe and well, promise me that old Pinto and his family shall remain undisturbed; if harm has befallen her, cut him down as you would a dog!" and the chief spoke with almost savage earnestness; and then, after a groan of anguish wrung from him by pain, he resumed:

"Now you know all I can tell you, and, Estelle, you will not find Flora an ignorant, ill-bred girl, for old Pinto was once a cavalier of Spain, and his wife, who clung to him through all his crimes and exile, was a noble lady, and they have instructed her, I know.

"Now, St. Vane, you will remember the Arcas group of islands; with good winds you can run there from here within a week, and—and—— Estelle, let me tell you that this brave youth is no pirate, but one whom only last night we picked out of the sea, where some enemy left him to die. Thankful to those who saved him from death, he gallantly ran us into a haven of safety, and

rather than desert us in dire distress, he stood by us in peril, and through his means the frigate and brig were so placed as to allow us to escape.

"Thus an All-wise Ruler seems to have directed affairs to bring us together, and an accident brought you on board this vessel to hear the dying confession of your unworthy uncle."

"But you may not die, you seem stronger even now," said Estelle, with feeling, while Leo said, softly:

"He was good to me, and it was old Pinto who made me promise never to tell what I knew, and Captain Lyndon told me one day I should see my sister Flora. No, I hope you will not die."

"Ah, Leo, boy, my life is ebbing out fast; now I am stronger, but it is the death-rally, the certain forerunner of death. A few more hours and Lyndon Eubank will be one of the innumerable throng tramping beyond the grave; yet I die content, for I am forgiven by you, Estelle, and you, Leo, and were my brother here I know his forgiving nature would pardon me. Ha! my very heart seems stilled, and—men ahoy!"

The last two words of the chief rang out as of old, and there came the sound of tramping feet as the men hastily gathered around him.

The burning eyes of the chief turned upon them, and his voice was firm, as he said:

"Shipmates, you have ever been faithful to me, and your chief bids you farewell. Here stands your future chief, a boy in years, but one worthy of any man's steel. Obey him as such, for to him I bequeath my schooner and my command. Shipmates, comrades in many a deadly combat, and victors on many a bloody deck, again your chief bids you farewell."

Rapidly the pallor of death deepened upon the handsome face, and as his two eyes gently closed, Estelle knelt and clasped the solitary hand of her uncle, while Leo timidly placed his light touch upon the broad forehead.

A smile hovered around the pirate's mouth at the act, and his breath came, harder and quicker, and just as the sun sank beneath the hills that marked the distant land, there came a quiver of the strong frame, and the soul of Lyndon, the pirate chief, sped away to cruise amid other realms.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BOY EXILE'S DISCOVERY.

Before midnight the schooner had run well in toward the land, and on short tacks was beating up under shelter of the cliff, where Carl determined to anchor, with his head to the wind and sails set, as the tide was also running out.

At length the Huntress dropped anchor, and springing into the captain's boat, Carl was rowed shoreward by four seamen, and a coxswain in charge, the same man who owed his life to the youth's pluck.

Leaving the schooner, Carl guided his boat into the bay, it being his determination to board the brig, and acquaint Lord Elgin with the circumstances already known to the reader, and ask him to send a boat with him to bring back Estelle and Leo, after which he intended to appoint a rendezvous with the nobleman in the southern waters, that he might restore to him the long-lost Flora, for the youth was determined that the wishes of the pirate chief should be obeyed, regarding old Pinto not being molested.

A close inspection of the bay, however, proved that the brig had flown, for nowhere was she visible, to his great surprise, for who could have piloted her to sea, he thought, unless it was Hugh Cameron.

"Carson, I'll run ashore and see what discovery I can make, and you just await me here," he said, as he guided the cutter alongside of the small pier at Sea Vista.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the old seaman; and springing ashore, Carl walked rapidly toward the mansion.

Through the handsome park, across the velvet lawn, he wended his way until the mansion loomed up before him grand and gloomy, for only a single light shone from the windows, and that from the library.

Cautiously he approached until beneath the shadow of a magnolia; he glanced through the open window into the spacious and comfortable room.

The astral lamp burned brightly upon the center-table, and all looked so home-like, so natural, to the poor exiled boy, that his eyes grew dim with sorrow.

At first the room seemed vacant, but then from the sofa arose a form—that of his beautiful mother.

Yes, there stood the mother who had driven him from her, without one word of explanation, and exiled him from his home.

Clad in deep mourning, and with her lovely face as pale as death, she paced the room with measured tread.

Then her lips parted, and she said, aloud:

"Hugh should have returned ere this. I wish he would come, for I feel strangely nervous to-night. And poor Carl, what of him—whither have his wandering feet led him? Oh, my son—my son, to thus turn your hand against your brother's life—it is fearful, and never again can I take you to my heart."

Carl had bent forward eagerly as his name was spoken, and seemed about to spring into the room, when he heard that he was unforgiven, and with a low moan, he sank back, and his mother continued:

"Poor, poor Oscar; cut off in the prime of your life; shot down ruthlessly with a laugh upon your lips at the thought of the joke you had played upon your brother. Poor, poor boy, to be killed because he feared you would in some way share his property. Oh, how warped must Carl's heart have become. Ah, me, I fear his will be a sad end, and yet, dearly as I have loved him, I can hardly pity him after his base crime—ay, crimes—for Hugh has given me proof of his wild, spendthrift life at college, and his squandering the ten thousand dollars paid into his hand by the insurance company. Well, I cannot blame Hugh for his bitterness, and yet I would that he had not branded Carl with such a fearful curse—it makes me shudder the very thought. Ah, me—ah, me, I have only Hugh to live for now, for forever from my heart and home do I exile Carl, and——"

Carl Cameron heard no more, but staggered back, his hand upon his brow, as he groaned forth:

"Oh, my poor, weak, misguided mother, to thus turn from thine own son—to believe him vile, an assassin, an intentional fratricide, all that is wicked, upon the word of one who took thy husband's, my father's life, and only a few hours ago left thy son to drown like a dog. But I'll not wake thee from thy dreaming, and pull off the mask from his face, for 'twould kill thee, mother, I know it would. Yes, he has branded me with a curse, and I am exiled from my own home; but I have made a vow—and he shall feel my revenge. I swear it!"

Rapidly retracing his way to the pier, Carl sprang into his boat, and his voice was harsh and stern as he gave the order to "give way."

Steering the boat across the bay, Carl passed into the inlet by way of the channel, which was now barely wide enough to let them through, and after a careful survey of the waters, he felt convinced that the frigate had also gone.

Then he started for the schooner, passing out at the inlet, and rowing along under the lee of the land until they came to the mouth of the bay channel, where the *Huntress* lay.

A few moments more, and Carl stood on the schooner's deck, the anchor was up, the sails filled, and falling off to catch the breeze, the fleet vessel darted away toward the South, just as Lieutenant Raymond approached his young captain, and said:

"I forgot to tell you, sir, that we have a prisoner aboard."

"A prisoner! who is he?" cried Carl in surprise.

"I do not know, sir; doubtless some planter on the coast. We took him as he was running in, in a little boat, shortly after you left the schooner, and in the preparations of getting under way I had forgotten him."

"Mr. Raymond, be good enough to bring the prisoner on deck, please," said Carl, and the next instant, the moonlight fell full upon the tall form of Hugh Cameron.

With a cry of mingled surprise, joy, and hatred, Carl started back, and then from Hugh Cameron arose a shriek of terror, as his eyes fell full upon the youth whom he believed dead.

"Aha, Hugh Cameron, you look and tremble as though you had seen a ghost. No, I am myself, Carl Cameron, in my own person, and Providence has placed you, unsought, in my hands."

The miserable man, with an effort, recovered his composure, and said, savagely:

"Satan seems to serve you, boy, for I deemed you at the bottom of the sea."

"Yes, and were happy in the thought, and I am happy now in having you here, where my vengeance can fall upon you."

Hugh Cameron glanced around the schooner with a nervous look, for from his first capture he had known the character of the vessel; but how Carl could be there, clad in a strange uniform, and apparently the commander of the craft, he could not fathom.

After a moment the boy captain continued:

"Now I understand the absence of the brig and the frigate. You piloted them to sea, did you not, Hugh Cameron?"

"I did."

"And were returning from that work when my men brought you to?"

"I was."

"Whither have those vessels gone?"

"To the southward, in pursuit of this craft, if it is the schooner known as the pirate *Huntress*," doggedly replied Hugh Cameron.

"You are right, this is the buccaneer vessel, the *Huntress*, and I am her commander."

"You, you, Carl Cameron, a pirate?"

"Yes. I know it jars upon your virtuous ears, but, nevertheless, 'tis true."

"You shall swing for this, and——"

"You may first set me the example, Hugh Cameron. Mr. Raymond, where is this man's boat?"

"Towing astern, sir; I lowered the sail."

"Have the sail raised, and set the boat adrift," sternly ordered Carl, and a few moments after, the little craft was tacking hither and thither upon the sea, until a sudden gust of wind capsized it.

"There, the tide is running in now, and that boat will drift into the inlet, and thy fate will be considered an upset at sea, Hugh Cameron. Mr. Raymond, bring the schooner up into the wind, and lay to; then call all hands aft."

"Ay, ay, sir."

In ten minutes more the *Huntress* lay with her head to the wind, gently rocking upon the waves. With his head bowed down in dread, Hugh Cameron stood near the young commander, no word passing between them.

After all was silent attention, Carl Cameron said, sternly:

"Men, I have summoned you aft to try for his life a double-dyed murderer. He stands here before you, cowering like the knave he is."

A deep murmur ran through the group of buccaneers, that boded no good to Hugh Cameron.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOOMED.

After the murmur had died away, Carl said, again:

"Men, I will tell you the story of this man's life, and leave you to judge him. His parents were wealthy planters, and he and his brother were their only heirs. The brother was of a sober turn of mind, studious, and, though generous, not a wild spendthrift as was this man, and when they grew to manhood the one was wealthy, the other a pauper, for he had run through with all that had been his own. Thus, he hated his fortunate brother, and that hatred was still more increased when that brother married a lovely woman whom this one also loved.

"Still that marriage did not break his heart, as within the month he also married. Each brother had a son born to them, this man's wife dying in giving birth to her child.

"Some years after, the brother of this man was lost at sea, so it was believed, he having, with a negro companion, ventured too far out in a sail boat, and a year had hardly passed when he became the husband of that brother's wife, and the two cousins became brothers. Dearly they loved each other, until the one came to understand that the other was heir to vast riches, and he had nothing, and then the son of this man hated his step-brother—ay, more, he plotted with his father to get the wealth the other would inherit. At length the two boys were sent to college, and there the son of this man entered upon a wild and extravagant career of gambling, that ended in his attacking his step-brother on the highway at night, to rob him of a sum of money he knew was in his possession.

"Not knowing who was his foe, and believing him a common highwayman, after a pistol was snapped in his face, he drew a weapon, fired, and this man's son fell dead. A court of inquiry was held, and, when examined, the unfortunate slayer of his brother stated, to shield that brother's character, that it was intended as a joke, the attack by the roadside, and he hid from the jury letters he had taken from the pocket of the dead, proving the whole plot against him.

"Cut to the heart by his brother's infamy, he had his dead body borne to his home, intending still to shield his name from shame before his parents. But there a sad greeting met him, for he was believed guilty of murder by his mother, and branded by an awful curse by his stepfather—ay, exiled from the home of his boyhood—yes, his own home.

"Yet, comrades, not yet did all end; for, driven almost to despair by the fact that his hand had taken a brother's life, and the fearful curse that had fallen upon him, the youth left the house to walk alone upon the beach, and at nightfall was seized suddenly, bound, gagged, and thrown into a boat by three men. Two of these men left him then, but the other hoisted the boat's sail, and stood out to seaward, and when, four leagues from the shore, he unbound and ungagged his foe, and threw him into the waters to drown.

"The man who did that foul deed stands there—he whom he thus condemned to die, and upon whose young life so much of misery has fallen, is here!" and Carl placed his hand upon his heart, while there arose a perfect shout of rage from the crew.

"Hold men! hear me through. He threw me into the sea to

die, and there you found me and saved my life. But ere he left me, struggling with the mad waves, he made a confession that seared my soul, and stirred up my life to vengeance. He hurled back at me, as he sailed away, that my father had not been lost at sea, as was believed, but had died by his own hand."

Another yell of rage burst from the crew, and one of them sprang forward, and glanced earnestly into the face of the trembling man.

It was Carson, the old coxswain, and he cried out:

"Oh, I know you now, Hugh Cameron, for I sailed with you many a year. Yes, I know that evil face, pale as it is with fear, and you recognize old Tom Carson, your boatswain on the Sea Slipper."

Then turning to Carl, he continued, excitedly:

"I'll tell you how your father died, sir, for I saw his death."

Lower and lower hung the head of Hugh Cameron, and his frame shook with a mortal agony of fear, as Tom Carson continued:

"We were off this point, or hereabouts, sir, for we had sighted White Cliff Light, and I was on deck with this man, who was captain then. Then suddenly we spied a boat adrift, and on it was clinging two men, well-nigh used up when we took them aboard, for they said they had capsized in a blow, and had been for two days, clinging to their boat."

"One of these men proved to be the captain's own brother, and the other was a negro man. Well, they were taken into the cabin, and our captain did all he could, he said, to fetch them both right again, but it was no use. They both died before morning, and I know we men thought it mighty strange, and said the captain had made a mistake in the medicine the steward said he gave them. Now I know that he poisoned them, for he was a cruel man, and I believe would do any deed of cruelty."

"Oh, Heaven!" groaned Hugh Cameron; and then Carl, said, sternly:

"Hugh Cameron, is this man's story true?"

"Yes; but do not take my life."

"Did you poison my father and his negro companion that you might marry his widow, and come in possession of his property?"

"Yes, Carl, I confess it; but for the love of Heaven, spare my life! I am not fit to die," groaned the unhappy man.

"Men, you have heard his story, and I leave you to decide his fate. Calmly consider all you have listened to, and when your decision is made, report to Lieutenant Raymond what is to be his doom."

So saying, Carl turned, and descended into the ward-room, for he had given up the cabin to Estelle and her brother.

In ten minutes he was summoned to the deck by Lieutenant Raymond, and the doom of Hugh Cameron was made known.

He was to be thrown into the sea to die, in the same manner he had condemned Carl to death.

With horror at the thought, Carl stepped forward to urge the men to change their terrible decision, when, by a quick movement, Hugh Cameron drew a pistol from his pocket, there was a flash, a report, a groan, a heavy fall, and the fratricide fell dead to the deck, his life hurled into eternity by his own hand.

There came a startled cry from the cabin, in Estelle's voice, and the sound of hurrying feet ascending to the deck; and, with a bound, Tom Carson sprang forward, seized the body of the suicide in his strong arms, and hurled it into the sea, just as Estelle and Leo appeared, in alarm.

But all looked quiet upon the deck, and stepping forward, Carl coolly said:

"Miss Eubank, we are about to get under way now, to sail for the South, whither the brig and frigate have already gone," and he went on to explain how he had discovered their departure from the bay and inlet, and that the pilot who had carried them to sea had said that they had sailed for southern waters in chase of the Huntress, which they believed had gone that way.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ARCAS ISLES.

One pleasant evening, two weeks after the sailing of the schooner from off Sea Vista Homestead, the Huntress was gliding along with the North Arca bearing half a point off the starboard bow, and ere sunset the anchor was let fall in eleven fathoms of water, and near the larger of the islands, upon which grew a small growth of trees, and toward the northern end rose to the height of forty feet above the sea.

Not a human being was visible upon the island, but a single pillar of smoke ascending above the tree-tops, proved that it was not entirely deserted, while several goats were visible upon the hills.

Not knowing what reception he might meet with, Carl Cameron determined to land first with half a dozen seamen, and reconnoiter ere he permitted Estelle and Leo to accompany him.

All during the run to the islands Estelle and Leo had kept up a feverish excitement about their expected meeting with Flora, and Carl was also nervous as regarded the favorable termination of the cruise, for he feared that some evil might have befallen the young girl.

At length the looked for haven hove in sight, and when the anchor was let fall Carl sprang into his gig, and, with a crew of half a dozen seamen, was rowed ashore, at a point where grew several stunted trees.

As the young captain sprang ashore he beheld a sight that caused him to pause and earnestly gaze before him.

There, lying upon the grassy carpet beneath the bushes, lay the form of a young girl of perhaps fourteen.

Her figure reposed carelessly, and the outline was perfect, while one sun-bronzed and beautifully moulded arm lay beneath her head, serving as a pillow as she slept.

Her face was burned as brown as a berry, but yet every feature was perfect, and the lashes of the closed eyelids rested far down upon the cheeks.

Her hair was golden brown, exceedingly long and worn in two braids, while her costume was of some gray material, the dress cut short, and a broad sun-hat and open book lay near her.

"Holy Neptune! but she's a mermaid!" exclaimed old Tom Carson, and at the sound of his voice the fair girl sprang to her feet, and would have bounded away had not Carl stepped forward, and said, kindly:

"Stay, please, we mean you no harm."

Then having convinced himself that this was the maiden he sought, Carl explained his mission, and they all entered his boat and soon reached the schooner, and between the island maid and her sister and brother, so long separated, a warm and happy meeting took place, one upon which the pen of the novelist must not intrude.

The following morning Carl broached a plan of disbanding to the crew, and was met with a willing assent from nearly all, though there were a few grumblers who still wished to lead a buccaneer's life, even if they ended their career on the galleys.

Then the large amount of spoils that had belonged to the dead chief were equally divided, after which the crew was disbanded to a man, and from them Carl made a careful selection of fifteen men, whom he desired to man the schooner, and second in command to himself he made Tom Carson—Lieutenant Raymond saying he was going to Cuba, to have a good time as long as his money lasted.

Having arranged with Senor Pinto to carry the crew to the several ports they desired to reach, Carl left them a supply of provisions, and just at sunset of the day following his arrival, sailed from the Arcas, bound in search of the English brig-of-war Sea Racer.

CHAPTER XXI.

A GLAD SURPRISE.

After the running down of the launch by the Huntress, Lord Elgin found himself and a score of his men in the water, and some of them, mangled and dying, sinking forever from sight.

With horror he beheld Estelle drawn aboard the schooner, and hastily hailing the two cutters, he was soon picked up with all those who had not found a watery grave, and rapidly the boats started in pursuit.

Then again another fear was at his heart when the brig, not knowing of Estelle's capture, opened fire upon the flying buccaneer.

It was a sad, terrible sight for a father to behold—his daughter borne away on the deck of a pirate, and some of the men recognizing Carl, the English noble realized how the two vessels had been deceived, and used by the sharp practice of the pirate to aid in his escape.

Seeing the uselessness of pursuit in the boats, Lord Elgin held council with the officers in the frigate's boats, and Bradford Brandt, and it was determined that the frigate and the brig should at once attempt to find their way seaward.

Then Bradford Brandt, who was nearly wild with despair at the loss of Estelle, whom he dearly loved, volunteered to row ashore and endeavor to find some one who would pilot the two vessels to sea.

This proposition was gladly hailed by all, and an hour after the English lieutenant stood on the balcony of Sea Vista Homestead.

No answer came to his knock, and the house seemed deserted; but at length, far down the road, he saw a *cortege* filing slowly along, and he started in pursuit.

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It was the funeral procession of Oscar Cameron wending its way to the family burying ground of the estate, half a mile distant back of the mansion.

Though his anxiety was great, Bradford Brandt would not break into the sorrows of those in that procession, and he quietly followed them to the grave, saw the coffin lowered into its last resting-place, heard the solemn service read over the dead, felt his heart throb with pity for the parents of the departed one, and then, as those in attendance turned from the sacred spot he broached his errand to an old gentleman near him, and was referred to Hugh Cameron.

Though greatly disliking to force himself upon the grieved ones, his duty urged him to do so, and he respectfully advanced, and in a few words made known to Hugh Cameron the cause of his coming into the bay, the escape of the buccaneer schooner, and the capture of Estelle.

"I will willingly offer my services, sir, to pilot both the brig and the frigate out to sea, if you will first accompany me to the mansion with my wife, who is broken-hearted at the death of her son," politely answered Hugh Cameron, and, Bradford bowing consent, they returned to the homestead, and after some further delay started to board the brig.

By this time the *Huntress* was hull down seaward, and when at last the brig got to sea, and started in pursuit, bearing off, however, to the south, as if expecting the schooner to change her course, after gaining a wide offing, darkness had come on; but the wind was switching round, and crowded with canvas the brig sped away, while Hugh Cameron, in one of the frigate's cutter's, that had gone out with the *Sea Racer*, headed for the inlet to pilot the other English vessel out of the trap into which Carl had led her.

As the frigate gained a good offing it was growing late, and then, in the little sail-boat the cutter had towed from the pier, Hugh Cameron started upon his return home.

His capture by the schooner, and his suicidal end, the reader has already seen, so I will now return to the brig, which, having failed to discover the *Huntress*, stood on to the southward, the known cruising-ground of that well-known piratical craft.

But the days went by, until one morning, three weeks after sailing in chase of the schooner, a sail was descried from the mast-head, which a closer examination proved to be the *Huntress*.

Lord Elgin, in deep sorrow at the loss of all his children, and the terrible fate he feared had befallen Estelle, was ill in his cabin; but the word sent him by Bradford Brandt that "The pirate schooner *Huntress* was in sight, three points off the weather bow, and heading toward the brig," cured him like magic, and five minutes after, he was on the deck.

"By Heaven, it is the schooner! I would know her hull and rig among a thousand. But what can she mean by running thus down to us?" said the puzzled commander.

"I cannot make it out, sir, unless she mistakes us for a merchantman; and yet her commander is a thorough sailor," said Bradford Brandt.

"Yes. Well, she cannot escape us now, thank Heaven! Mr. Brandt, let the men go quietly to quarters, and have the sailing crew ready to throw themselves in the rigging to set more sail at an instant's notice."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the lieutenant, and the brig was a scene of surprised excitement.

Nearer and nearer the two vessels approached each other, until only a mile divided them, and then the lookout hailed the deck with:

"She carries a large white flag at her peak, sir,"

"Ha! I see it now! What can it mean?"

"Perhaps it is to surrender the *Lady Estelle*, my lord—for had she not been taken on the schooner, as she was, doubtless, she would have been killed or drowned."

"Heaven grant you are right. Brandt, if the fellow does me this favor, he shall go scot free if I lose my commission, and pay my crew their prize-money from my own purse," earnestly said Lord Elgin.

"We are near enough to command him wholly with our guns. Shall we open fire to bring him to?" said Bradford, after a pause.

"No, not yet. Ha!"

The exclamation was caused by seeing the schooner suddenly come up into the wind, while at the same time her sails came down to the deck by the run, and the beautiful vessel lay motionless upon the waves.

The next moment a ringing voice hailed:

"The *Sea Racer*, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, the schooner!" shouted back Lord Elgin, while Bradford said:

"Yonder fellow is the same daring young pilot who led the brig and the frigate into a trap."

"You are right. Listen!"

"This is the schooner *Huntress*, once a pirate craft, and if Lord Elgin would see his children safe and well, let him come on board."

"My children! Good Heaven! what can he mean? Lower away my boat, men—quick, for the love of Heaven! Brandt, lay the brig to, and then come with me—Morton will take command. Lively, boys, lively with that boat!" and in a fever of nervous excitement, Lord Elgin went over the brig's side into the boat, followed by Bradford, and a few minutes after stood on the schooner's deck, where they were met by Carl Cameron, who in a frank tone told the nobleman all that had happened, and then sympathizing with his impatience, led him into the cabin, where a glad meeting took place between the father and his restored children, a meeting that gave joy unalloyed to the hearts of Carl Cameron and Bradford Brandt.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

Lord Elgin Eubank rejoiced in his inmost heart at the restoration of his children, and yet grieved for the sad end of his brother Lyndon, slain, the chief of a pirate band.

As the *Sea Racer* had yet six months to remain in American waters, he threw up his commission, and leaving Bradford Brandt in command, went on board the *Huntress*, and sailed at once for England, as Carl placed the schooner wholly at his service.

Arriving in England, the *Huntress* was anchored off Eubank Manor, and Carl Cameron became the guest of the nobleman, while the schooner's crew were paid off and dismissed, excepting old Tom Carson, who remained as sailing-master of the beautiful vessel, which the young commander presented to the nobleman, to be converted into a yacht.

From Eubank Manor Carl wrote a long letter to his mother, telling the truth of the affair between himself and Oscar, and asking her to visit the university and see for herself which of her sons it was who had led the life of a gambler there.

Of Hugh Cameron and his crimes he did not speak, for he determined to keep all that to himself, and furthermore led her to believe that, exiled as he was from her heart and home, and branded by a curse, he had left *Sea Vista* that night, expecting never to return to the spot where he had passed his happy boyhood years.

Three months passed away, and a letter came from Mrs. Cameron to her son, begging him to forgive her all, telling him of the loss of her husband at sea, the finding of the capsized boat, and begging him to return at once and gladden her sad heart.

The next clipper ship carried Carl Cameron westward ho! Three years after, there anchored in the bay of *Sea Vista* the schooner yacht *Huntress*, having on board Lord Elgin Eubank, Captain Bradford Brandt, and his beautiful wife, formerly known as Estelle Eubank, Leo, and Flora, the latter grown into a maiden of seventeen, and possessing wondrous beauty—a beauty that won Carl Cameron's heart, who in return found a place in her love, from which, as his wife, only death could make him an exile, and blessings, not curses, fall upon.

[THE END.]

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